

RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Varicella (Chickenpox) Outbreaks In Day Care, Preschools, Schools, Colleges, and Universities

Infectious Agent	Varicella Zoster Virus
Mode of Transmission	Spread by close contact (sharing breathing space or direct touching) with infected secretions from nose, throat, or rash.
Incubation Period	Range of 10 to 21 days from time of exposure (typically 14-16 days)
Period of Communicability	1 to 2 days before the rash appears until 5 days after the rash appears
Clinical Presentation	Wild-type chickenpox in unvaccinated persons: Generalized rash (typically 200-400 lesions with many vesicles. Usually mild fever and cold symptoms occur 1-2 days before rash onset. Breakthrough chickenpox in vaccinated person: Generalized rash more maculopapular than vesicular (usually less than 50 lesions).
Varicella Cluster/Outbreak	3 or more cases of varicella occurring over a 3-week period of time

Reporting Varicella

1. Report all varicella cases to the Rhode Island Department of Health Immunization Program **by faxing the Varicella Case Report Form to 222-1442**. The Varicella Case Report Form is available at www.health.ri.gov/topics/chickenpox.php.
2. Report suspected school outbreak or cluster of cases (3 or more cases in a 3-week period) to the Rhode Island Department of Health Immunization Program **by calling 222-5921**.

Guidelines to Prevent and Control Varicella Outbreaks

1. Exclude all students with varicella for 6 days or until all lesions have crusted.
2. Identify susceptible students/staff who are at high risk for developing severe disease (i.e., pregnant women and immunocompromised individuals) and refer to health care provider.
3. Review immunization records of students for either varicella vaccine or a physician statement of history of disease. Students who are susceptible should be referred to their health care provider for vaccination.

Notification Guidelines

When varicella occurs in a school population, the school nurse and school physician should determine, based on their medical judgment, whether any, some, and/or all parents, students, and/or staff should be notified. They may consult with the Department of Health if necessary. Prior to notification, they should discuss the situation with the school administrative head. A sample notification letter is available at www.health.ri.gov/topics/chickenpox.php.

Recommended Actions for Schools in the Event of an Outbreak

If an outbreak of vaccine-preventable disease should occur, all students with Medical or Religious Immunization Exemption Certificates should be excluded from school by the school administrative head for a period of time that is determined by the Department of Health based on a case-by-case analysis of public health risk.

1. Exempt students may return to school 2 weeks after rash onset in the last reported case. Any students who are vaccinated during this period may return to school immediately following vaccination.
2. The school should maintain an accurate and current list of all unvaccinated students.